DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 226 857 PS 013 398

AUTHOR Katz, Lilian G.; And Others
TITLE Assessing the Development of Preschoolers.
INSTITUTION Maharaja Sayajirao Univ. of Baroda (India).
PUB DATE Mar 83
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; Guidelines; *Informal Assessment; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

To assess whether or not a child's development is going well, preschool teachers might ask the following questions: Does the child fall asleep easily and wake rested? Does the child eat with appetite? On the average, over a period of 3 or 4 weeks, does the child have bowel and bladder control? Does the child exhibit a range of emotions? Does the child's play vary over a period of time? Does the child occasionally exhibit curiosity, adventure, and even mischief? Does the child usually accept adult authority? Can the child initiate, maintain, and enjoy a relationship with one or more children? Is the child capable of sustained involvement, absorption, and interest in something outside of himself or herself? Does the child express spontaneous affection for one or more adults? Is the child capable of enjoying the potentially "good things of life," such as going on picnics and exploring new places or materials? The first three questions are particularly sensitive indicators of the child's development. The remaining questions, representing preschool teachers' most important goals for their pupils, can be easily inquired about or observed directly. Observation of a child's functioning on these criteria over a period of 3 weeks provides data usually sufficient for assessment purposes. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED226857

Assessing the Development of Preschoolers

Lilian G. Katz and the Staff of the Chetan Balwadi*
Department of Child Development
Faculty of Home Science
M. S. University of Baroda
Baroda, India

It is only natural that from time to time parents wonder whether their children are developing normally. Parents often ask questions like Is my child doing what he is supposed to at his age? Do all children of his age behave the way he does in certain situations? and numerous other questions reflecting a desire to know whether the child's development is going well. Preschool teachers also look for norms by which to assess their pupils's progress and achievements and by which to determine whether there is something in particular that they should be doing to aid the child at a given moment in their young lives. Normative scales tend to focus on development as though it is some kind of product, outcome or end point.

In this discussion we wish to address the question of whether a child's development is going well at a given time in terms of ongoing or continuous developmental processes. As we look at each child in the class along the behavioural dimensions outlined below we can begin to formulate answers to the question What next step of development needs encouragement and support for this particular child right now?

PS013398

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Lilian G. Katz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

For children whose physical and mental endownments are normal, ups and downs in the long course of development inevitably occur and occasionally require adult intervention. In order to assess whether or not a child's development is going well, or whether it is in a 'down' period requiring special attention, the following categories of behavior can be observed. Difficulties in any single one of the categories on the list should not cause alarm. Indeed, difficulties in several of the behavior categories do not imply irreversible problems. Rather these difficulties help us notice those periods when the child's own life or situation, for a wide variety of reasons, are out of adjustment with his or her emerging needs.

The judgement as to whether or not special and specific interventions or actions are necessary should not be based on one or two days' observations. if the child is three years old, a picture of his/her functioning on these behavioral criteria over a period of approximately three weeks provides a sufficient sample on which to make an assessment. If the child is four years old, four weeks give a sufficiently reliable picture of the quality of the cild's life. At five years, add another week, and so forth.

1. Sleep

Does the child fall asleep easily and wake up rested? Wake up ready to get on with her life? Occasional restless nights, nightmares or grouchy mornings are alright. The average pattern of deep sleep resulting in morning eagerness is a good sign that the child experiences his life as satisfying.

2. Eating Habits

Does the child eat with appetite? Occasional skipping of meals or refusal of food is alright. Sometimes a child is too busy with activities more absorbing that the mealtime, or perhaps is more thirsty than hungry and resists parents' anxious pleading over vitamins and other nutritional abstractions. A child who, over a period of weeks, eats compulsively or obsessively as though famine is around the corner, or who constantly fusses about the menu or picks at the food, is likely to have got on "the wrong foot" in life. The function of food is to fuel the system adequately in order to be able to get on with the important business of (a child's) life. It should not become a central part of the content of adult-child interaction.

3. Toilet Habits

On the average, over a period of three or four weeks, does the child have bowel and bladder control? Occasional 'accidents' are alright, especially if there are obvious mitigating circumstances such as excessive intake of liquids, intestinal upset, or simply being too absorbed with ongoing activity to attend to such 'irrelevancies'. Children who sleep well often take long to stay continent at night.

4. Range of Affect

Does the child exhibit a range of emotions? Over a period of weeks does the child show the capacities for joy, anger, sorrow, grief, enthusiasm, excitement, frustration, love and affection and so forth?

Not all in one day, ofcourse! A child whose affect is 'flat' or unfluctuating - always angry, always sour, always gay or enthusiastic - may be in trouble. The capacity for sadness indicates the presence of its correlate, namely attachment and caring, both important signs of healthy development. Low intensity of feeling, unvaried or 'flat' affect may signal the beginning of depression.

5. Variations in Play

Does the child's play vary over a period of time does the child add in elements to his play, even though he plays with the same toys or materials? If the child always, ritualistically or stereotypically engages in the same sequence of play, using the same elements in the same way, he or she may be emotionally 'stuck in neutral', so to speak, and need some temporary special help. Increasing elaboration of the same play, or optimum varieties of play indicate sufficient inner security to literally play with the environment.

6. Curiosity

Does the child occasionally exhibit curiosity, adventure and even mischief? If these behaviors are constantly displayed they may signal a search for boundaries. If the child never pokes at his environment, or never snoops where forbidden then he or she is not pushing against perceived boundaries enough for healthy development, perhaps due to fear of punishment or an over-developed conscience.

7. Acceptance of Authority

Does the child usually accept adult authority? Occasional resistance, assertion of her/his own point of view or desires, expressions of objections even though ultimately yielding to the adult, indicate healthy socialization processes. Always accepting adult demands and restrictions without a peep suggests excessive anxiety, fear or perhaps a weakening of self-confidence or curiosity.

8. Friendships

Can the child initiate, maintian and enjoy a relationship with one or more children? The evidence is now persuasive that the preschool years are a period of rapid learning of social interactive competence, and that lack of such competence can have long term negative consequences for development (cf. Puttalaz & Gottman, 1981). The social and cognitive skills and knowledge required for making and keeping friends are considerable, and experience in the company of other children in and of itself is not enough to ensure a smooth learning curve. Some children need 'coaching' from the sidelines (cf. Asher, Oden & Gottman, 1977). A child who plays alone oftenis not in trouble as long as he is <u>not</u> doing so because she is too fearful or lacks competence in relating to other children. Similarly, a child who frequently makes great claims concerning his or own superiority over others may be trying to reassure himself that he is alright, or may feel in danger of losing some privileged status or of failing to meet parents' lofty expectatons. Such behavior may create difficulties in the development of social competence or relationship-building later on, and should be addressed by the teacher.

9. Interest

Is the child capable of sustained involvement, absorption and interest in something outside of himself or herself? Does the child's capacity for interest seem to be increasing to longer time intervals of involvement in activities, games or play? The emphasis here is on sustained involvement in activities rather than 'passivities' such as television. The child's increasing and sustained involvement in such passivities as television may signal some difficulties requiring adult intervention. However, a child who cannot 'lose himself' in an activity, or who rarely stays with an activity or sees a project through to completion may need help.

10. Spontaneous Affection

Does the child express spontaneous affection for one or more of those he spends lots of time with? Demonstration of affection varies from family to family, and among cultures and sub-cultures, and such variations must be taken into account. Nevertheless, in ways that are culturally appropriate, a child whose development is going well is likely from time to time to let significant others know that he or she loves them, loves being with them and near them, and at the same time that he is experiencing the world and his life as gratifying and satisfying. Excessive expressions of this kind however may signal doubts about the strength of major attachments call for assessment of the child's interpersonal environment to determine whether intervention is necessary.

11. Enjoy the 'Good Things of Life'

Is the child capable of enjoying the potentially 'good things of life'? For young children playing with others, going on picnics, to parks and parties, family gatherings at festivals, exploring new places, materials and toys are the potentially good things of life in the preschool years. If a child does have a problem, e. g. shyness, fear of insects, food dislikes, etc., but the problem does not prevent her from participation and enjoyment of these goodies, then it is reasonable to assume that, with a little help, the problem will be outgrown. This view should reduce the probability of over-interpreting children's behavior and assuming great difficulties or abnormal development on the basis of fleeting momentary set-backs. If howeverthese problems do get in the way of enjoyment or prevent participation in good events, then an adult should intervene with appropriate help.

Summary

The first three items on the list are particularly sensitive indicators of the child's development since they are under the child's control and since they are behaviors that only the child has (unconscious) control of and which no other person can perform for him.

The other items are somewhat more culture-bound and more situationally determined. However, for preschool teachers, they are likely to

represent their most important goals for their pupils, and they are generally aspects of behavior they can observe or obtain information about from parents. In any case, if the overall and average picture of the child's functioning obtained from sampling all eleven behavior categories indicates a low point in development, preschool teachers are in the ideal position to do something to help the child get back "on the right foot" again.

*This paper was prepared while the first author was Fulbright Visiting Professor in the Department of Child Development, Faculty of Home Science, M. S. University of Baroda, Baroda, Gujarat, India. 1983.

References

Asher, S., Oden, S. & Gottman, J. M., "Children's Friendships in School Settings" in L. G. Katz et al. (Eds). Current Topics In Early Childhood Education , Vol. 1. Ablex Publishing Co. Norwood, N. J. 1977.

Pullatz, M. & Gottman J. M., "Social Skills and Group Acceptance" in S. Asher and J. M. Gottman (Eds.) The Development of Children's Friendships , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.